



United States Department of State

*Office of Foreign Missions
Washington, D.C. 20520*

NOTICE

Department of State Has Requirements for Entry of Diplomatic Shipments

Foreign missions, international organizations, and their accredited personnel in the United States are lucrative and stable clients of the freight-handling industry. The United States is home to roughly 300 diplomatic missions and international organizations consisting of nearly 15,000 representatives. According to the U.S. Department of State's Office of Foreign Mission (OFM) 31,689 foreign diplomatic and consular shipments arrived at U.S. ports during 2003.

Freight-handlers should be aware of the strict regulations governing the clearance procedures for the entry of shipments belonging to the diplomatic and consular community. Shipments of this type are unique and must not be processed for customs clearance into the U.S. by procedures used for standard cargo. It is important to understand that, under Federal statute, it is improper for members of the freight-handling industry or shippers to circumvent this regulation.

Shipments belonging to the foreign diplomatic and consular community require approval from OFM before U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) will permit entry into the United States. This inter-agency coordination allows CBP to honor U. S. government obligations under the Vienna Conventions and the International Organization Immunities Act. All foreign diplomatic or consular shipments, with the exception of properly marked diplomatic or consular pouches and printed matter, require the direct submission to OFM of Form DS-1504 entitled "Request for Customs Clearance of Merchandise." Following OFM's approval of such requests, CBP will process the shipment's release.

OFM is aware of instances where members of the freight-handling industry have assisted members of the foreign diplomatic and consular community in circumventing the entry requirements for diplomatic or consular shipments. It is important for the industry to be aware that, under the Foreign Missions Act (22 U.S. Code Sections 4301 and following), it is unlawful for any diplomatic or consular mission, or any member or dependent thereof, to obtain any customs clearance services in connection with the described shipment types by means other than the direct submission of Form DS-1504 to OFM. If members of the diplomatic and consular communities insist that their shipments should be cleared by a different procedure, OFM advises the freight handler to contact OFM for guidance at 202-895-3500, 24 hours a day.

In connection with the above rules, members of the freight-handling industry should take notice of the fact the Department of State is now contemplating new regulations that would directly affect members of the freight-handling industry. Until now, the requirements described above have applied solely to members of the diplomatic and consular communities, and private U.S. persons or entities. The Department of State is now contemplating extending these requirements to members of the freight-handling industry as well. After these proposed new regulations go into effect, it would become unlawful for members of the freight-handling industry to render any customs clearance services in connection with shipments to members of the diplomatic or consular community by means other than the direct submission of Form DS-1504 to OFM.

Members of the freight-handling industry who have any question regarding the proposed new regulation, or wish to express any comment concerning it, may contact OFM Program Officer, Cliff Seagroves by phone at 202-895-3541.

By authorization of the Foreign Missions Act, OFM is responsible for regulating many of the activities of foreign missions, certain international organizations, and their members in the United States. Outside of Washington, OFM has regional offices in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and San Francisco. For more information concerning OFM visit www.state.gov/ofm.

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